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Book Review by Douglas Porch of: The French Army 1750-1820: Careers, Talent, Merit written by Rafe Blaufarb

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ture" and created the "new" art history. The emphasis is on interdisciplinary work, but the many ventures into the area by this journal—including articles by British historians—let alone by those who are rethinking "history" (the ostensible subject of this volume), give way to the controversies among art historians about the best way to understand images.

The remaining seven essays fall within these extremes. Most, like Clark, delineate the particular achievements of British academics, bringing under that umbrella both foreigners who taught in Britain (like Geoffrey Elton) and natives who left for foreign shores, usually the United States (such as Bernard Lewis). The last receives respectful treatment from Christopher A. Bayly, writing about the Orient, alongside an appreciation of Edward Said—a rare balance these days, when even Fernand Braudel is tarred with an ideological brush for being pre-Saidian.

Essays on gender and class, by Ludmilla Jordanova and David Feldman, inevitably give major attention to non-British work. But the other four authors (Burke on historiography, John Breuilly on the "nation," E. Anthony Wrigley on population, and Roy Porter on disease) manage to center their accounts on their fellow countrymen.

These attentions notwithstanding, a goodly number of the most influential and magisterial historians of the past century fail either to appear or to leave much of an imprint in this volume. We hear nothing about the creators of one of the profession's most stimulating centers, the Institute of Historical Research in London; its important early director, Albert F. Pollard, who helped shape Tudor historiography, is cited only because he used the word "Evolution" in one of his titles. Sir Charles Firth, doyen of Stuart history, is totally absent, as are Michael Roberts (whose work on Sweden was a landmark in studies of state-building), Alan Macfarlane (one of the first to link anthropology with history), and dozens of others who, by any account, played starring roles in British historical scholarship in the twentieth century. The individual essays do offer interesting assessments of some of the preoccupations of the profession in this period, both traditional and interdisciplinary, but the uneven coverage means that the survey is not as useful as it might have been.

T.K.R.

The French Army 1750–1820: Careers, Talent, Merit. By Rafe Blaufarb (New York, Manchester University Press, 2002) 227 pp. $69.95

The tradeoffs between the efficiency and combat performance of military forces and their political loyalty, a challenge for any country, posed an especially acute test for France during the tumultuous years of the Revolution and Empire. The French army was totally transformed between 1789 and 1815. However, historians have also recognized for

some time that military transformation in the French army predated the Revolution. In fact, 1789 caught France in the throes of a bitter organizational debate as military reformers attempted to renovate the patchwork of socially exclusive court regiments and privately subscribed line units into a state-controlled, centrally funded, unitary force led by an officer corps selected on the basis of "merit." The *petite noblesse,* who stood appalled as a cash-strapped Bourbon monarchy auctioned off regiments to affluent bourgeois *parvenus* and dispensed senior military commands to a court-connected *noblesse presentée,* positively reveled in the promise of military regeneration offered by the Revolution. Alas, as Blaufarb notes, successive Revolutionary governments proved reluctant to entrust the future of the Revolution to a nobility that political rhetoric had condemned as adversaries of progress and foes of the nation.

Aristocratic reformers of the *ancient régime* interpreted "merit" to mean a social and moral commitment, a system of reciprocity whereby military service to the state was rewarded by distinctions and honors from a grateful leader. The turmoil of the Revolution and the obsession of successive governments with the political loyalty of the officer corps meant that no stable system of officer selection and promotion could be established, until Napoleon incorporated Bourbon notions of "merit" into a military organization able to conquer Europe.

The French Army 1750–1820 is an interesting, well-researched, and clearly written account of late eighteenth-century *mentalités*. The Revolution's struggle to fill the officer corps with politically reliable substitutes for defecting aristocrats, and the tensions that it created in the officer corps, though familiar, is well told. Many may disagree with Blaufarb's conclusion that the turmoil of the Revolution served to depoliticize the officer corps, and that the tradition of *La Grande Muette* was well established by the end of the Directory. On the contrary, the author suggests that by 1799, French officers were on their way to developing a "stab-in-the-back" myth that was waylaid only by Napoleonic victories. Nevertheless, his point that, ultimately, Napoleon's "careers open to talent" reconciled pre-1789 notions of the reciprocity between service and reward with the Revolutionary concept of an officer corps opened to the socially mobile offers an original perspective on the Napoleonic synthesis.

Unfortunately, while the book has a unifying theme, it lacks focus. The subtitle is misleading. Careers are not really discussed, and distinctions between talent, competence, professionalism, and merit are not clearly drawn. Nor does Blaufarb make clear how "merit" as "character" that developed in the bosom of the military family differs from, or contributes to, "professionalism." Rather, merit as Blaufarb defines it is ultimately a social contract between the officer and his sovereign as distinct from "personal qualities which would secure advancement" (200). From this perspective, military education is discussed as an "entitlement" rather than as a way of familiarizing the future officer with the rudiments of his profession. From Blaufarb's standpoint, the era of the French

Revolution and Napoleon seems to have retarded, rather than advanced, the professionalism of the French forces. The overwhelming conclusion to be drawn from the book is that the debate about "merit" is really about job security, privilege, and entitlement, not professionalism.

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Creating the Welfare State in France, 1880–1940. By Timothy B. Smith (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003) 241 pp. $75.00

Until recently, political historians have argued that France was a "stalemate-society" during the Third Republic (1871–1940), especially during the 1920s and 1930s. They have referred to those years as "hollow" because of a lack of significant social policies, not just because of the loss of lives during World War I. Furthermore, until about a decade ago, other historians have maintained that the French welfare state began as late as 1945. In this fine new book, Smith joins recent historians who dispute those earlier historical claims. Focusing on municipal programs and institutions, predominantly in Lyon, but including comparisons with other cities such as Paris, he convincingly demonstrates that in terms of social policy, the decades of the 1920s and 1930s were indeed not hollow years, but were filled with social programs that led to the welfare state. Moreover, Smith understands the late nineteenth century and recognizes the origins of social welfare during the last three decades of that century. This book not only contributes to a history of France's social politics; it also provides a historical case-study methodology for understanding the development of welfare states in general and the development of national medical benefits in particular. Smith avoids discussion of national debates, and bases his analysis on meticulous archival research in Lyon.

Before 1914, private charities, usually conservative Catholic, discouraged national welfare, always secular, because the locals contended that national welfare interfered with their regional autonomy. Despite resistance from the provinces, however, national legislation of 1893 provided for free medical assistance to the needy. Legislators argued that this measure was to protect the nation's health and "human capital" for better military preparedness. Smith's master narrative sustains the accurate thesis that the fear of depopulation and degeneration motivated the development of the welfare state, especially after World War I. Smith also argues that the war brought important permanent change to social welfare by creating a sense of geographical solidarity. In the postwar years, cities had to help reconstruct the nation—not just the infrastructure but the human structure as well. Public assistance expanded, and national interests took precedence over the interests of the local elite. As cities like Lyon extended medical care to the surviving soldiers, to